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ABSTRACT

Character or values instruction has been relegated to the hidden curriculum since the decline of 1960s values programs. However, teachers are beginning to use character instruction in an organized way. The purpose of this study was to determine whether instruction using children's literature would effect student perceptions of value laden behaviors. Using two intact groups, data were gathered using a pre and post test opinionnaire with an abbreviated likert scale. Subjects in the study (n=56) were third and fourth grade students. Students participated in 10 weeks of instruction including reading literature, discussion, journal writing, and group projects. These and other qualitative data were collected to identify student views. To assess the effectiveness of the program, data were subjected to inferential statistical analysis using t-test for dependent groups. The focus was that lower post-scores were desired. Qualitative data indicated students learned better ways of resolving conflicts, were more honest in their assessments of situations, exhibited less careless behavior, and complimented one another instead of criticizing. In as much as scores and on the instrument and qualitative samples reflect effectiveness of program activities it would appear that students were positively impacted and the project was successful. (JBJ)

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Effects of Values Instruction on Third and Fourth Grade Students

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A Paper Presented at the 1994 Meeting of the Mid-South

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to determine whether values' instruction affected students' perceptions of value-laden behaviors. For this study two intact groups were used. Data were gathered using an opinionnaire with an abbreviated likert scale. Subjects in the study were third and fourth grade students in a local school system. The subjects participated in value's instruction using children's literature as the focus. An opinionnaire was pilot tested and administered as a pre and post test to determine change in student perceptions after instruction. Student writings, classroom discussions, projects, and other qualitative data were collected to identify student views.

To assess the effectiveness of the program, data were subjected to inferential statistical analysis by using t-test for *dependent* groups. The focus was that lower post-scores as opposed to pre-scores were desired. Qualitative data were compiled. The results indicated that for the fourth grade the mean difference in pre and post test scores was -10 points with a standard deviation with a of 13.5. This was found to be significant at the .002 level of confidence. The third grade class had no statistically significant difference. In as much as scores and on the instrument and qualitative samples reflect the effectiveness of the program activities it would appear that the students were positively impacted and the project was successful.

Effects of Values Instruction on Third and Fourth Grade Students

Passing on "traditional American values" has long been a part of our educational curriculum. Teachers have always instructed students on appropriate behaviors such as respect for other's property and not to cheat or steal. Character or values education has been relegated to the hidden curriculum since the decline of the values programs of the 1960s. Society now believes that schools should provide instruction on morals and moral behavior (Gallup Polls, 1993). Although there is increasing public support there are still many unresolved issues such as what values should be taught and how to teach them (ASCD Update, 1993).

Teachers are beginning to use character instruction in an organized, planned way. While instruction of values is not the one and only solution to the problems that afflict our youth, a systematic approach to the teaching of values is vital to any attempt to change student perceptions and ultimately their behaviors. To positively effect learning, instruction should be real and personal. It should be related to students' lives and experiences (Hunter, 1994). Children's literature by its nature does this (Swinger, 1981). Psychologists agree that narrative thought gives meaning to life and is the manner in which individuals interpret their lives. It has been suggested that stories of historical events and famous lives be used to

counter moral illiteracy and provide examples of appropriate moral behavior (Bennett, 1994 ; Kilpatrick, 1992). Children need a moral point of reference and examples illustrating what is right and wrong so that moral behaviors can be promoted. Children also need fairy tales in which to work through adverse situations (Bennett, 1994). This study was designed to determine whether instruction using children's literature would effect student perceptions of value laden behaviors.

Methodology

Two intact groups were selected to participate in this preliminary study based on teacher interest and accessibility. The subjects in this study were 56 third and fourth grade students from two separate schools in a local school system. The target group of 32 girls and 24 boys had varying educational, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

A twenty-five item opinionare was designed and administered to the subjects. Students participated in ten weeks of instruction including reading literature, discussion, journal writing, and group projects after which the post test was administered.

To assess effectiveness, data were subjected to inferential statistical analysis using a t- test for dependent groups. Three analyses were performed on pre and post test scores. The intent of the measurement focus was such that lower post - scores were desired. Journals were also kept by the classroom teachers and the researchers to note trends in qualitative data. Qualitative data were compared with quantitative results to verify accuracy.

Results

The following results were obtained and are shown in the tables:

1. The fourth grade group had the desired lower post test mean score with the mean difference between pre and post scores being -10 points.
2. The t - value for the fourth grade pre and post - test was - 3.56 which was statistically significant at the .002 probability level.
3. The third grade group showed a slight gain between pre and post - test (1.57) points.
4. The t - value for the third grade pre and post - tests was not found to be statistically significant.
5. When subjects from both groups were combined the mean difference in pre and post - scores was -4.439 points.
6. The t - value for the groups combined was -2.177 which was statistically significant at the .03 level of probability.
7. The variance between the fourth grade pre and post test scores was greater than that between third grade pre and post test scores.

Table I
Pre and Post Means

Group	*Variable*	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Mean Difference*
Fourth	pre	63.050	14.781	
	post	52.300	28.000	- 10.750
Third	pre	52.809	9.217	
	post	54.381	8.511	1.571

Table II

T - test Analysis for Intact groups

Group	*T - value*	*Probability*	*Significance*
Fourth	- 3.558	0.0021	yes
Third	0.761	0.4553	no

Table III

T - test Analysis for Combined Groups

Group	*Mean*	*T-value*	*Probability*	*Significance*
Combined	- 4.439	- 2.177	0.0354	yes

The qualitative data indicated that all students changed their perception on some item but not on others. The classroom teachers noted the following changes.

1. Students learned better ways of resolving conflicts.
2. Students were more honest in their assessments of situations.
3. Students exhibited fewer examples of careless behavior.
4. Students complimented one another instead of their past critical behaviors.

They shared projects such as cartoons, plays, and a video showing a news broadcast of what they had learned.

Conclusions

Inasmuch as scores and teachers record-keeping reflect the effectiveness of the program activities, it would appear that the students were positively impacted, and therefore successful. Eminent philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle , John Locke, John Dewey and others have articulated educational insights of enduring value. They were nearly unanimous in assuming that adults, as either teachers or parents, should have the authority and responsibility for shaping the character of children (Wynne & Ryan, 1993). It therefore seems plausible to suggest that instruction in character education has positive effects and should continue.

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